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DOH-BAY OBSERVES WORLD AIDS DAY



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Panama City, Fla.— The Florida Department of Health in Bay County (DOH-Bay) is observing World AIDS Day. World AIDS Day is an annual observance held on December 1. This year's theme is "Ending the HIV/AIDS Epidemic: Community by Community". DOH-Bay is working hard to end HIV/AIDS in Bay County with the help of our partners.

"We know not one organization alone can end HIV/AIDS in Bay County", said Sandon S. Speedling, MHS, CPM, Administrator/Health Officer for DOH-Bay. "What we do know is that together, we can make real progress with our partners such as BASIC of Northwest Florida and PanCare Health."

More than 1.1 million people in the US are living with HIV, but one in seven HIV-positive people do not know they are living with the disease. That's why DOH-Bay offers free, confidential, and rapid HIV testing every Tuesday. Test results are available in just 20 minutes! Hours are 7:30 am – 2 pm and 4:30 – 7 pm. DOH-Bay provides immediate access to treatment for the newly diagnosed as well as retaining HIV-positive persons in the care system, with the goal of getting HIV-positive persons to an undetectable viral load. This reduces the chance of transmission to others. With early diagnosis, individuals can begin appropriate treatment and care resulting in better health outcomes.

DOH-Bay also offers Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) medication at no cost. PrEP is a once-daily pill that can reduce HIV-negative individuals' risk of acquiring HIV. **PrEP should be used in conjunction with other prevention methods, like condoms, to reduce the risk of transmission.** According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, taking PrEP daily reduces the risk of contracting HIV by more than 90 percent. Patients can obtain up to a 90-day supply of PrEP through their local CHD STD and Family Planning Clinic.

We have made great strides in prevention, early identification and treatment, however there is still much work to be done. In addition to our other services, we also work to increase community outreach and awareness about HIV, high-risk behaviors and the importance of knowing one's status. We also work together with our partners including BASIC of Northwest Florida and PanCare Health to ensure persons have access to care.

DOH-Bay offers high-quality HIV testing services, but you can also locate HIV counseling, testing and referral sites by visiting [KnowYourHIVStatus.com](https://www.flhealth.gov/your-hiv-status) or texting your zip code to 477493. For more information, call the Florida AIDS Hotline at 1-800-FLA-AIDS or 1-800-352-2437; en Español, 1-800-545-SIDA; in Creole, 1-800-AIDS-101. You can also call DOH-Bay at 850-872-4455, visit Bay.FloridaHealth.gov or follow us on Twitter @FLHealthEmerald.

About the Florida Department of Health

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